

“MAKE PEACE, NOT WAR”: NAVIGATING LIBRARY STAFF CONFLICT

Presenters

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CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

“I HATE IT WHEN YOU _____. IT MAKES ME SO MAD!”

CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE

■ Good Discord vs. Bad Discord

- In a workplace with good discord, employees are able to express opinions in an open way that allows for disagreement without taking anyone taking those comments personally or negatively.
 - Good discord leads to creativity, problem-solving and innovation
- “Bad” discord can take many forms but is usually marked by poor communication or a lack of civility, where coworkers – intentionally or unintentionally - disregard each other’s feelings, experiences and perspectives.
 - Bad discord leads to conflict

IMPACTS OF WORKPLACE CONFLICT

■ Impact on workplace

- Bad Decision-making
- Poor morale
- Too much time spent resolving conflicts
- If not resolved (or ignored), conflict leads to high turnover of staff
 - Management will have to spend more time recruiting, onboard and train new staff.

■ Impact on Community

- Usually manifests as poor customer service, which can lead to
 - Poor view of the library
 - Patrons taking resulting bad moods out on those around them in the community

WHEN WORKPLACE “WARFARE” TURNS TOXIC

■ Characteristics of Clear Toxicity

- Disruptive behavior
- Condescend or belittling comments
- Poor communication skills
- Gossip

■ Characteristics of Emerging Toxicity

- Avoiding communication
- Putting off a task until later or avoiding it entirely
- Consistently late for shifts
- Unorganized, i.e. no one knows anything or where anything is

THE BOTTOM LINE OF WORKPLACE CONFLICT

“How employees treat one another affects their ability to work together but also their feeling toward the job and the organization as a whole. And people don’t like to put in the work at places they just don’t like or like to be at. When they are surrounded by many difficult people or beleaguered by just one, employees can be less motivated and less committed to their jobs. This effect can begin to influence other workers until the productivity or creativity of an entire organization slows to a halt.”

(The Schmuck in My Office, 17-18)

SEEDS OF CONFLICT



EMOTIONAL REACTIONS CAN BE TRIGGERED BY:

- **Issues/Situations involving**
 - Respect (or perceived lack thereof)
 - Non-Constructive Criticism
 - Misunderstandings / Poor Communication
 - Hostility
 - Perceived indifference



EMOTIONAL REACTIONS CAN BE EXACERBATED BY INTERNAL FACTORS.

You are more vulnerable to emotional breakdown when you are:

- **H**ungry
- **A**ngry
- **L**onely
- **T**ired

(Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers, 88)

DEALING WITH IMMEDIATE CONFLICT

“IS IT ME? IS IT YOU? IS IT BOTH OF US?”

DON'T AVOID THE ISSUE

■ Forms of conflict avoidance

- Ignoring the issue by denying it exists.
- Sidestepping the issue by changing the subject.
- Completely withdrawing from the situation.

■ Avoiding communicating vs. letting it go

- “Avoiding will typically lead to bigger problems. However, in some instances this strategy is useful. If a conflict is trivial or transient in nature, avoidance keeps the incident from becoming a bigger problem than is warranted.”
(*The Dysfunctional Library*, 111)



LET'S RESTORE PEACE & LOVE!



FIRST

1. **R**eset your emotional state.



BREATHING EXERCISE: “BOX” OR “TACTICAL” BREATHING

- Inhale deeply through your nose, expanding your stomach, for a count of four.
- Hold in that breath for a count of four.
- Slowly exhale all the air through your mouth, contracting your stomach, for a count of four.
- Hold the empty breath for a count of four.

(from *Dare to Lead* by Brene Brown)

THEN

1. **R**eset your emotional state.
2. **E**valuate the situation.
3. **A**ssume nothing.



CAREFULLY CONSIDER...

Point(s) of conflict and corresponding emotional trigger

- Ask yourself:

- What am I really angry about?
- What is the problem and whose problem is it?
- What kind of resolution would satisfy me?

Factors at Play—Intent, Perception, Narrative (Yours/Theirs)

FINALLY

1. **R**eset your emotional state.
2. **E**valuate the situation.
3. **A**ssume nothing.
4. **D**eal with the issue promptly.



DEALING WITH THE ISSUE

- **Handling the conflict can take on many forms:**

Level 1: Letting the issue go—if its transient in nature and ultimately not going to bother you further

Level 2: Setting aside a time and place to calmly discuss the issue with the coworker or employee in question. Give each other the ability to share perspective; practice active listening.

Level 3: Involving a third-party (such as supervisor or HR rep) to mediate the conflict between yourself and the other person. Work toward compromise whenever possible.

Strive to communicate in-person; don't simply resort to email.

- Email is not the best place for communicating about issues of nuance or matters of perspective.

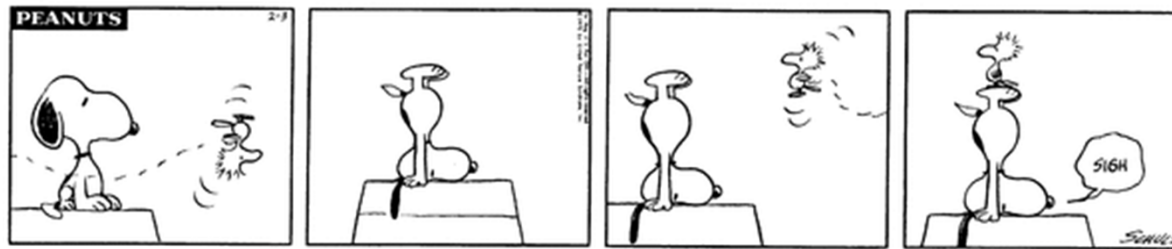
ADDITIONAL ADVICE FROM *THE DANCE OF ANGER*

- **Don't strike when the iron is hot.**
 - If your goal is to change an entrenched pattern, the worst time to speak up may be when you are feeling angry or intense. (199)
- **Don't use "below-the-belt" tactics.**
 - Interpreting, diagnosing, labeling, preaching, ordering, interrogating, ridiculing, etc. (200)
- **Don't make vague requests. (200)**
- **Don't participate in intellectual arguments that go nowhere. (i.e. trying to convince someone of the rightness of your position) (200)**
- **Do recognize that each person is responsible for his or her own behavior. (201)**

THINKING LONG-TERM

“HOW CAN WE DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN PEACE & LOVE?”

FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL: YOU



“Avoiding dysfunction in the library starts with the self.”
(Dysfunctional Library, 14)

We aren't saying that *only you* need to change. We are saying that change *starts* with you. We recommend focusing on three areas that only you ultimately control to create peace in your workplace:

- **Your mind**
- **Your emotions**
- **Your words**

1. WORK ON BEING MINDFUL.

■ What is Mindfulness?

- “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” (Kabat-Zinn)
- It does not conflict with your personal beliefs.
- It’s about slowing down to really see what’s around and within you.

■ Why Mindfulness?

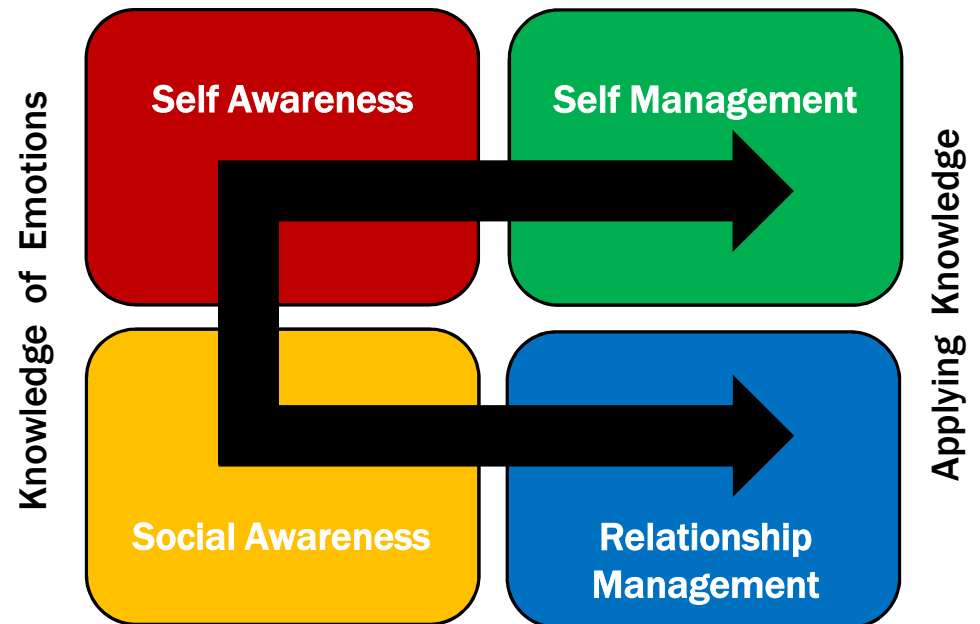
It can prevent lack of awareness, which causes:

- Unconscious, automatic (knee-jerk) actions and reactions
- Passive listening (instead of active listening)
- Not understanding your own mind, or how your feelings cause you to react in a way that can lead to conflict with others



2. DEVELOP EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE.

- **What is Emotional Intelligence (EI)?**
 - Self awareness (of your own emotions)
 - Self management (of your actions)
 - Social awareness (of the emotions of others)
 - Relationship Management (i.e. your interactions with others)
- **Can I improve my EI?**
 - Yes! Just thinking about your emotions and how your actions affect others can improve your Emotional Intelligence (*Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, 26)



3. COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND OPENLY.

Poor communication looks like:

- ✗ Reacting too quickly
- ✗ Avoiding communicating altogether
- ✗ Being sarcastic, passive aggressive, or using unclear language
- ✗ Passive/mindless listening
- ✗ Criticizing without being constructive

Effective communication looks like:

- ✓ Practice active listening
- ✓ Use “I” statements when explaining your thoughts/feelings
- ✓ Be direct
- ✓ Avoid mixed messages
- ✓ Provide effective feedback

**OUR WORLDS OVERLAP—
AND WE ALL NEED TO COEXIST
PEACEFULLY.**

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME!
-BETH & PEARL

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